

# The Christian News-Letter

Edited by  
J. H. OLDHAM.

No. 12

JANUARY 17, 1940

DEAR MEMBER,

Since the News-Letter was started I have had a large number of letters about the Christian attitude to war and I promised that the issues raised would be frankly discussed in the News-Letter. This week's Supplement is devoted to a statement of some of the difficulties felt by the Christian conscience in regard to war, as these have found expression in the letters that have reached me.

I do not propose in this letter to elaborate the reasons which weigh with those who do not take the pacifist position. They were stated in part by Reinhold Niebuhr last week. But as the case for pacifism is given in the Supplement I should like to indicate briefly what I believe to be the Christian ground for a different attitude, not with a view to controversy but to further mutual understanding.

Before doing this I may refer to a point of view which appears in a number of letters, though it has not found its way into the Supplement. It is that, whatever the immediate causes of the war, the disease of which war is a symptom is common to all countries, and that the issues of right and wrong are not as simple and clear as the apologists for the war make out. There is a deep truth in this view which has found expression, and will find increasing expression, in the News-Letter. But the difference between the conception of liberty and toleration embodied in our national tradition and the doctrines we are opposing is radical and was clearly stated in Reinhold Niebuhr's letter last week. There could hardly be a more striking illustration of the difference than the fact that in contrast with the conditions in totalitarian systems the public discussion of life and death issues of national existence should be permitted in this country.

## THE NEED FOR MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

If the Christian witness is to be effective in the reshaping of the world in days to come it is of the highest importance that those who on Christian grounds take the pacifist and the non-pacifist position should understand one another. If this effort is honestly made, we may hope through it to arrive at a deeper common understanding of the relation of the Christian faith to modern society.

The authentic note of a Christian decision to participate in war or to refuse participation must always be: "This is a terrible choice, but before God I can make no other." No one who has not faced the pain involved in either choice and not felt the religious call of the position which he rejects has made a decision that is genuinely Christian.



## THE CHRISTIAN GROUNDS FOR A NON-PACIFIST POSITION

The difference of view has its roots, as I believe, in the tension, which I wrote about in *Christian News-Letter* 9, between the new Kingdom inaugurated by Christ and the world as it actually is.

Pacifists sometimes make the problem simpler than it really is by assuming that the only question which the Christian has to decide is his individual duty as a follower of Christ. One of my correspondents asks: Would Christ have used war to advance his ends? The answer is, Certainly not. War is most emphatically not a method of the Kingdom of God. But the way in which the question is put obscures the real problem.

The Christian is not only called to enter into a new life in the Kingdom of God but is also at the same time a member of an earthly society, sharing in its collective activities; and these activities just because they are shared with others are not under the control of his individual will. Hence there is a continual and inescapable tension between what he might wish to do in the light of the new values to which his eyes have been opened and what is practicable in the collective sphere in which his power to influence decisions may be small.

If we leave out of account this reality of collective life, then I do not think that there is an answer to the pacifist case. But refusal to set the collective life on one side is a decision that rests on specifically Christian grounds. To share in the collective activities of society is the lot assigned to man on earth by God, and is for this reason something to be reverently accepted. To ignore it, or quarrel with it, is to oppose oneself to God's ordering of the world.

We must indeed hold that nations as well as individuals are subject to God's law. But God's moral education of the human race is slow and gradual, because of the hardness of men's hearts. Consequently the right step for a nation at a particular stage and in a particular situation may be something that falls far short of what is demanded of those pledged to Christian discipleship. For nations, as for spiritually immature individuals, a moral choice may be far removed from the highest Christian standards and yet be a step in a right direction. If in a given situation the acceptance of war by a nation is morally better than any other practicable alternative, then it may be right for Christians in their capacity as citizens to concur in that course.

My own experience may serve as illustration. When I listened in on September 2nd to the report of the debate in Parliament and there seemed to be an unexpected hesitation on the part of our Government, or of the French Government, about implementing the pledges made to Poland the thought almost made me ill. It seemed that if Great Britain went back on undertakings solemnly given, the last shred of international honour and good faith would have disappeared and the bottom would have fallen out of life. Terrible as war was, what seemed to be staring one in the face appeared an even deeper tragedy.

I am not trying to convert or persuade those who take the pacifist position. There is obviously much more to be said on both sides of the question. I only want to urge that the question is many-sided, and that the vital matter for the Christian is that he should make a responsible choice before God. The bonds which unite those who make such a responsible Christian choice, even though they reach different decisions, are stronger and deeper than the ties which link either group with those who on different grounds take the same position in regard to war as themselves.



## IDS TO AN UNDERSTANDING OF PRESENT-DAY CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

I spent the last week-end with a few of our collaborators and one or two others. They were all agreed that there was a growing community of outlook among those who are trying to understand the present situation in the light of Christian faith, and that this had been greatly helped by the publication of certain books, and more particularly the following:

- John Baillie. *Our Knowledge of God* (Oxford Press, 1939. 8s. 6d.).  
Christopher Dawson. *Beyond Politics* (Sheed and Ward, 1939. 3s. 6d.).  
V. A. Demant. *The Religious Prospect* (Frederick Muller, 1939. 7s. 6d.).  
C. H. Dodd. *History and the Gospel* (Nisbet, 1938. 6s.).  
T. S. Eliot. *The Idea of a Christian Society* (Faber and Faber, 1939. 5s.).  
Jacques Maritain. *True Humanism* (Geoffrey Bles, 1938. 10s. 6d.).  
Reinhold Niebuhr. *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (S.C.M. Press, 1936. 6s.).

(A taste of Niebuhr's style and thought may be obtained from his small pamphlet also published by the S.C.M. Press, *Do the State and Nation belong to God or the Devil?*, price 6d.)

I do not suggest that these are necessarily the most important books published during the last five years. It is interesting, however, that a group of people representing different traditions and types of experience were in agreement about the books which they wished to include in the list. Some of the books are rather stiff, and many of you will not have time to read them all. But you may be glad to have a list that will keep you in touch with some of the vital movements in Christian thought.

## THE SCALE OF NATIONAL VALUES

In a letter to *The Times* last week, Sir William Beveridge writes: "If we are to restrict consumption we must not do so at the cost of vital needs. Above all we must not do so at the cost of children. The needs of every family in the country vary with the size of the family; the greatest single cause of poverty in this country is young children. . . . Neither in this war nor at any time can we afford to leave children without the necessities of healthy life and growth."

Yours sincerely,

*Dr. De Laan*

**Back Numbers.** We have had so many requests for copies of the Christmas Number, with Miss Dorothy L. Sayers' Supplement, that we are reprinting it. We still have a few copies of other back numbers and these can be supplied to members at: Single copies, 3d.; six copies, 1s.; twelve copies, 1s. 9d.; twenty-five copies, 3s. 6d. The titles of the Supplements are

No. 0. What is a "Christian News-Letter"?

No. 1. What is God doing?

No. 2. A Community with a Purpose.

No. 3. Evacuation—A Social Landmark.

No. 4. Religion and the Army in the Last War.

No. 5. Preliminaries to the Consideration of Peace Aims.

No. 6. The Fate of the Jews.

No. 7. Can the Feelings be changed?

No. 8. Is this He that should come?

No. 9. The Papal Encyclical.

No. 10. The World-Wide Christian Society.

No. 11. Christianity and Political Justice.

**Subscriptions.**—The rate of subscriptions to the *News-Letter* is 10s. (\$3 in U.S.A. and Canada) for one year, and 5s. 6d. (\$1.50 in U.S.A. and Canada) for six months, and 3s. for three months.



**Citizens' Advice Bureaux.** Among the new forms of social service which have come into existence to meet the needs of war-time are the Citizens' Advice Bureaux. There are now 179 of these in London and over 800 in other parts of the country. The personnel in London alone numbers more than a thousand. The staff of the Bureaux has to be chosen with great care, and owing to the expansion of the work a training scheme is now being organised.

The questions with which the Advice Bureaux have had to deal are very varied. They include such matters as the legal position in regard to instalments on houses and furniture; allowances to old people by sons and daughters which can no longer be paid when the son is called up for military service if he is married; possibilities of evacuation for older people; and arrangements through the Red Cross for sending messages to relations in Germany, the number of such messages already sent being more than 6,000.

There is nothing new in the attempt to advise people who are in difficulties. It is a service which has been rendered in every age by public-spirited members of the community; and in the England of yesterday it is a service for which people looked as a matter of course to the parson, the squire, the magistrate or—in the poorer quarters in great cities—the individual social worker. What is new and significant in the conception inspiring the Citizens' Advice Bureaux is that they represent a service rendered by the community to the community as a whole. They are an effort of mutual help, and the circumstances of the time prevent them from being something provided for one class of the community by another, conscious of its public duty but unconscious of its own need. The Bureaux are consulted daily by people in all walks of life and in all classes of society; and those who work in them are drawn from just as wide a field. The experiment expresses a growing understanding that we are all members one of another, and it may be hoped that the work of the Bureaux will develop on more permanent lines but without change of spirit when peace conditions have been restored.

**Welfare Work in the B.E.F.** A brief account was given in C.N.-L. No. 7 of the

work of voluntary welfare organisation serving the Forces. These have now been given permission by the War Office to start their work for the B.E.F. in France, for which they have been waiting some weeks. The Y.M.C.A., the Church Army, the Church of Scotland, the Salvation Army and the Catholic Women's League will now open canteens and recreation rooms in a great number of towns and camps. Several hundred Y.M.C.A. men and women workers will be sent abroad in the next few weeks. Toc H will also soon open two Talbot Houses in the British area in France.

**Finland.** From a Dutch member: "In this wild world of 1939 no small nation can survive if the big nations let their policy be completely dominated by their self-interest. And what shall hold them back? What is there to refrain them from indulging in ever increasing lust for power and expansion? It is only the knowledge that there is a higher order, an order *above* the nations, a law to which all nations are subject. And that insight is in the last analysis a Biblical insight. It is the great gift of the God of the Old and New Testaments to Western civilisation.

"Finland may rely on God, it may call on Him, and we may call on Him for the sake of Finland, because God is a God of justice and order and a ruler of the nations. Justice is finally not a human affair. *God* is interested in justice.

"If we see the cause of Finland in this light, we will not be tempted to think in terms of a crusade, that is, of a direct identification of any national cause with the cause of God. But neither will we be tempted to see its battle as a merely political battle which has nothing to do with the Christian faith. And we will also see that in a battle of this kind we cannot possibly remain spiritually neutral."

**Membership.** Up to the time of going to press this week the number of our subscribers had reached 8,481.

**Folders.** Black rexine folders with adjustable clip and stamped with the C.N.-L. monogram in gold for holding 26 copies of the CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER are now available at the price of 2s. each, post free.

*All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—*  
THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 20, BALCOMBE STREET, DORSET SQUARE, LONDON, N.W.1.



## CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION TO WAR

The many letters from our readers show the acute dilemma in which sensitive consciences find themselves in regard to war. On the one hand it seems to be God's will that aggression and tyranny should be restrained, and on the other hand it seems impossible to believe it to be His will that they should be restrained by the means which war makes necessary.

There is, for example, a letter from a headmaster in early middle age who has rejoined the O.T.C. because he definitely does not want to be out of the war if he can serve any useful purpose by being in it. And yet he feels that the challenge comes clearly that war is wrong and in itself quite indefensible. He knows that he cannot leave the decision to anyone else and has got to make up his own mind. It is not, he says, a particularly interesting or original story, but he believes that he is typical of thousands.

The main burden of the letters is not only the incompatibility of war with Christian discipleship, but also the futility of modern methods of war to accomplish any spiritual ends. One correspondent asks for an explicit reply to the question: What values can be achieved by war. Another writes that the Christian method is to overcome evil with good and that, while a Christian might approve of methods themselves neutral, he is quite unable to reconcile himself to overcoming evil by being as evil as the evildoer. A third insists that it belongs to the nature of war that the ideals for which it is waged should in the process be compromised. A nation at war is exposed to the constant temptation to become assimilated to that which it is opposing. Under the pressure of war Great Britain and France are forced to become increasingly totalitarian and are in grave risk of succumbing to the evils of such a system.

With the advice of my colleague, Dr. A. C.

Craig, who is a pacifist, and of a few others, I have decided that the substance of the correspondence can best be presented by quoting somewhat fully from three of the letters and memoranda which have come to us.

### I.

The first is a statement by a minister on the theological grounds of the pacifist position.

The issue before the Church, he writes, is not merely the rightness or wrongness of war, but the meaning of the Gospel. The understanding of the Gospel in which Christian pacifism is grounded may be put in the following way.

(a) Christ, the Very Son of God personally present in the world, once and for all revealed and established a new order of existence—the Kingdom of God—into which it is open to all who hear the Gospel to enter by the gate of faith. This Kingdom is not an ideal to be striven towards, but a miraculous Deed accomplished and accredited by God in Christ.

(b) Citizenship in the Kingdom confers upon entrants the gift of liberty which is its native air and by virtue of which they become creative bearers of the new life in Christ. All specifically Christian action starts from, and does not work towards, this liberty of the sons of God; and since it is action within, and not towards, the Kingdom, it can have only one law, the absolute law of love, which the conscience enlightened by Christ recognises as holy, right and good, and which is the only bond of a true society. Just because specifically Christian action has this derivation and this absolute norm, it is charged with power to break the sin-bound sequences of history (the Pauline law of sin and death) and to change the corrupted life of the world. This is exemplified on the scale of the individual life wherever a



soundly converted man finds himself delivered from sin by the miraculous forgiveness of God and thus freed to love and serve his neighbour; it has been grandly manifested over and over again on the broad scale in the missionary enterprise of the Church whereby the life of whole peoples has been visibly transformed. Always the source of creative energy has been the same—"the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free," the miraculous gift of God offered to faith.

(c) The Church is the community of those who, having heard and responded to the call of God in Christ, are living within the radically new order of being which is the Kingdom. Wherever the Church is authentically the Church of Christ, and not a simulacrum, its life is directly derived from the Holy Spirit and therefore distinguished by powers of creative impact on the life of the world as in the missionary enterprise already mentioned. The false church—the church which labours at the oars in the darkness with the impotent efforts of humanistic idealism—is hardly distinguishable from the world in which it is embedded and on the powers and technique of which it virtually relies.

(d) What is the bearing of this on the issue? Christian pacifists affirm that the Church will deliver the world from war provided the Church can bring to the task the true quality of its supernatural life, the liberty of the sons of God, that same quality which, using its own proper methods and independently of the State's resources, transformed wild Ngoni and cannibal South Sea islanders within living memory. Christians will make peace, the claim is, only as they act from peace (the peace which passes understanding because it is the peace of God) and not towards it. The bearers of the new life will be those who by faith have anticipated the end of things and so are giving substance here and now to things the world hopes for. Pacifists hold that to participate in war (especially in its modern form) is a denial and desertion of this Christian status and a falling back upon reliance on the powers which slew Christ instead of on that Power which raised Him from the dead. The difficulties inherent in this position are immense, of course, but they are not religious

difficulties; they are the moral difficulties which men encounter when they discover that in a sinful world the action of love is the image of Christ's love entails suffering in the image of Christ's death.

## II.

Another of our correspondents writes as follows:—

The ground of the pacifist objection to war is not merely the large-scale slaughter of human beings. This might be due merely to a sentimental squeamishness about death or a quite indefensible elevation of earthly life as such to a sacred value. The appalling abomination of war to me is the totality of personal, or rather impersonal, relationship in which war involves those who take part in it and into which they must enter at this time of day with fully open eyes. It deliberately destroys the indispensable foundations of any right relationship between persons, and therefore makes it quite impossible for the distinctively Christian vocation to be fulfilled at all. I can imagine all sorts of very evil things into which a Christian might enter and still bring with him something of a distinctively Christlike style of life, but modern war does not seem to me to be one of them.

Nobody would maintain that a mixture of a diluted militarism with a diluted pacifism would be any good. I have always felt that it is better to do the one or the other thoroughly and not try to mix them. I feel therefore, that Britain is *relatively* right in going to war, and that there would have been a moral failure, given the total universe of discourse in which the nation moves, if she had not done so. Yet I am equally clear that I cannot betake myself so far into that universe of discourse as to be able to make that choice sufficiently mine to allow me to participate in the war method itself. At the point where my specifically Christian vocation and witness becomes totally submerged I must make my stand, and can only hope and pray that God in his manifold wisdom will use both Britain's *relative* right choice and my poor witness to something different, in such ways as to bring something worthwhile out of the horrible muddle of it all.

There are things which many non-pacifists are not prepared to do at any price even in war. In other words both pacifists and non-pacifists are at one in acknowledging the absoluteness of *right* in the determination of the method of resisting evil. Why then do pacifists meet the incidence of what is right overriding all considerations of the good at one point and non-pacifists at another? There may be at work here a difference in sensitivity of imagination. Non-pacifists do not in fact feel the absolute wrongness of the war method with the same degree of intensity; and not feeling it with that degree of intensity they are not really envisaging the problem and not dealing with it.

### III.

A group in East London has submitted a carefully worked-out and balanced statement on the Christian attitude to war. In this the pacifist position is stated in the following terms:

This position is for us primarily neither humanitarian principle nor a political expedient, but a command of God to us as individuals and as such an absolute. "Here stand I. I can do no other." Having reached such a position of conscience we must, however, examine its full implications for society before we can make a claim for it to be anything other than a purely individual position. As soon as we do this we recognise that, in common with all other human posi-

tions, we are involved in compromise. The mere refusal to kill in no way absolves us either from a responsibility for the sin and the suffering of the nation as a whole nor from participation in the war machine in so far as we are members of a nation at war. We believe, however, that while compromise is an inevitable feature of any human situation we are given a choice between a minimum and a maximum compromise. Given the fact that war is unchristian, we hold the pacifist position to be the minimum compromise and therefore the most constructive position we can take as Christians. . . . Our task as Christians is not to spend our time within the war machine in a vain effort to prevent it from defeating its own ends, but to concentrate upon the strengthening of those forces in the country which do not rely, in the last resort, upon violence. We necessarily see our task in terms of a change in the economic order for we know that our pacifism would be irrelevant to the present situation if it were not implemented in this realm. To refuse to kill human beings by arms but to acquiesce in a system which kills them just as surely, soul and body, in other ways is a compromise we cannot make. . . . Our energies must therefore be directed towards the true socialist revolution which we are convinced must be brought about by non-violent means if it is to be enduring.

---



# Analysis of Decisions of Local Tribunals for Registration of Conscientious Objectors up to 16th December, 1939.

Tribunal	No. registered as Conscientious Objectors unconditionally		No. registered as Conscientious Objectors on condition that they undertake civil work or training		No. registered for non-combatant duties in the Armed Forces		No. removed from the Conscientious Objectors register		Total
London .....	41	4%	411	40%	368	36%	207	20%	1,027
South Eastern .....	50	14	216	62	61	17	25	7	352
East Anglian.....	114	36	90	29	87	28	23	7	314
Midlands .....	21	5	292	70	35	9	67	16	415
South Western .....	144	37	191	49	39	10	14	4	388
North Eastern .....	28	7	124	33	133	35	95	25	380
North Western .....	72	23	116	37	33	11	91	29	312
Cumberland and Westmorland	3	8	18	49	11	29	5	14	37
Northumberland and Durham	26	13	99	51	34	18	34	18	193
North Wales .....	21	17	87	72	7	6	6	5	121
South Wales .....	52	15	195	57	61	18	33	10	341
South East Scotland	16	14	40	36	34	30	23	20	113
South West Scotland	47	16	67	22	71	23	117	39	302
North Scotland .....	1	6	4	25	6	38	5	31	16
North East Scotland	3	11	8	30	10	37	6	22	27
—	639	15%	1,958	45%	990	23%	751	17%	4,338

*All communications and subscriptions should be sent to—*

THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 20, BALCOMBE STREET,

DORSET SQUARE, LONDON, N.W.1.